Patrick Henry Hughes once said in an interview “I mean, God made me blind, and didn’t give me the ability to work. I mean, big deal” (Hayes). Hughes knows that he has a disability and has accepted living with a disability but that has not hindered his ability to play music and perform. Patrick Henry Hughes and his family have been put in the spotlight multiple times in the past couple of years representing the “disabled people” and their relationship with their families. Having been a recipient of the television show “Extreme Makeover, Home Edition”, the family and Hughes have been labeled as “overcoming” a tragedy (Fenton). Simi Linton has plenty to say about this labeling and how the term disability needs a new meaning. With the help of Linton, this essay will discuss the inappropriate spotlighting of Hughes, but instead how he needs to be recognized for what he does, not how he does it.

 The best description of the Patrick Henry Hughes is all in the picture below. When one first views the image, all one can see is a young man in a wheelchair, but after researching the people in the photograph, one can learn there is much more to the pair. Patrick Henry Hughes grew up in Louisville, Kentucky with three siblings (Fenton). He spent his entire life not being able to do “normal” activities but he grew up to be an accomplished musician. What he lacked in the ability to move, he made up for in his talents for music. The site in which this image was found was on the Horry Telephone Cooperative website, where Patrick Henry Hughes was recognized for being the guest speaker at an awards ceremony. The awards ceremony was in honor of children and students in the community achieving the unachievable.

Patrick Henry Hughes has been put into many television and award programs for being inspirational, but is he inspirational because he is disabled or is he inspirational because he is an excellent musician? Is the young man being recognized for the right reasons? The Hughes family has been put into the spotlight many times. Patrick John Hughes, Patrick Henry Hughes’s father, has been recognized for marching his son through the Louisville University Marching Band Show in 2006-2007 (Hayes). A deed that could not have been done by everyone’s parent, the story inspires people because of a father’s dedication to his son. The Hughes family has been a recipient of ABC Network’s show “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition”. “Patrick Henry's story is appealing "to all of us," said designer/carpenter Paul DiMeo, "but it's also a story about … the wonder of parenting and the commitment that good parents make to their children. Both Patricia and Patrick (John) make that to their family."” (Fenton). The cast and crew of the show recognize that the family is special for their dedication for each other. The spotlight and the family’s receiving of the new home is accurately given because of the network wasn’t just showing pity, they were just trying to show their audience how connected the family is to one another.

Another issue with the story of Patrick Henry Hughes is the continuation of misused terms. In one article by Erin Hayes called “Blind, Wheelchair-Bound Student Does Not Fail to Inspire” the author is guilty of the first impression misinterpretation of the “overcome”. “Well this will be sweet. He (Patrick Henry Hughes) has overcome so much. How nice he can play the piano.” (Hayes). Although it was just an initial reaction, Hayes’s statement has a lot of meaning about how people view disabled people in society. Author Simi Linton, a disabled person herself, tells her audience in her essay “Reassigning Meaning” that there is two ways of interpreting “overcoming”, that the person no longer has a disability or the person has risen to society’s expectations. “The compliment has a double edge. To accept it, one must also accept the implication that the group is inferior and that the individual is unlike others in that group” (Linton 228). Linton explains why it is incorrect to say that a disabled person has “overcome so much”. The statement makes the person feel unlike everyone else in society and by Hayes thinking and then writing that down about Patrick Henry Hughes is writing without thinking.

The image of Patrick Henry Hughes is one that takes a lot of background reading and research to fully understand its true meaning. Without reading about the picture, one could just assume the young man is playing his trumpet on the side lines with someone to steer him. But the real reason why the picture is inspiring is because the father has enough dedication to his son to guide him through a marching band show, attending all the practices, and keeping I shape with students have his age. The image isn’t important because Patrick Hughes is in a wheelchair, the image is important because he is committed to something he loves.